

# Off-Highway Driving Tips

**A**dvertisements showing an SUV perched in some incredibly wild, rugged place are terribly misleading. Often the vehicle was set down there by helicopter! SUVs are meant to stay on existing roads, and throughout the area covered by this guide, the law requires it. Four good reasons: save the landscape, save your vehicle, save yourself, save on fines and a fat towing bill...

But SUVs are well-designed to meet the special challenges of off-highway routes like those in this guide. Here's the know-how that will keep you right side up and moving forward.

## Essential courtesy

**Stay on the road**—don't crush brush. Yield to uphill traffic, hikers, bicyclists and horseback riders. If horses act jumpy, turn off your vehicle and wait for riders to get them under control. Yield to livestock and wildlife. If you open a gate, close it. Pack out trash.

## Road and weather conditions—plan in advance!

**Let someone know where you're going, when you'll be back and whom to call if you're not.** Most routes in this guide are subject to sudden snowstorms. Rain storms, especially summer cloud-bursts, can wash out any road. Parts of a few routes follow narrow canyon bottoms and are subject to the deadly hazard of flash floods. If thunderclouds are building up, don't go there!

**Steep hills**—Use a low gear on steep slopes and 4WD for extra traction if it's rough or loose. Take your time going up; don't overheat. On downgrades use a low gear to save your brakes and 4WD if there are sharp curves. Don't turn around on a steep hill—back up to a safe, level place.

**Dirt roads and rough surfaces**—No routes in this guide are extremely rough, but several have rough stretches and you may encounter a wash-out. Always wear safety belts. Even smooth-looking dirt is unpredictable: you could find your tires skidding, jumping or chattering. Take your time—reduce the risk of losing control or puncturing tires. Use 4WD to move steadily, low range if it's also steep or extra-rough. Know your ground clearance. Don't straddle large rocks or high spots that could hit low parts of your vehicle; slowly crawl your tires over them, after looking to make sure you can clear them. Hear a big clunk? Check for damage and leaking fluids immediately!

**Sand, mud, ice or snow**—Stop, get out, check depth and test the surface before you venture forth. These surfaces are notoriously



Early 20th Century touring along Mill Creek  
COURTESY BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

unpredictable and can change into a frictionless mess under your tires. Know your vehicle's capabilities. Use 4WD. Go slowly but keep moving—don't lose momentum. Take turns gradually. On ice or snow, in a straight stretch with no one around, test the surface while moving by applying the brakes and by swerving a bit; if you feel a skid, slow down even more and if it's still iffy, put on your tire chains. Never try to dodge a wet, muddy stretch by making a new set of tracks around it—turn back and try again at a drier time of year.

## Pulling off and turning back

**If you must pull off the road**, find a bare, firm, level place. Never stop over dry vegetation which can catch fire from your exhaust system. When you encounter iffy road or weather conditions, play it safe and turn back. You may save yourself major embarrassment, a big tow bill, a long hike or a long wait. To avoid crushing brush or getting stuck, back up to where you can turn around on bare, firm soil, or make a fifteen-point turn if necessary!

## Getting unstuck

Even the most cautious and experienced drivers can get stuck when an unexpected icy or muddy patch causes them to skid into deep sand, mud or snow. Here are tips for getting out:

**Don't keep revving up and spinning your tires**—this digs you in deeper. As soon as you're stuck, get out and see what the problem is.

**Use your shovel** to take down any mounds of snow or soil in front of tires or jamming the undercarriage. Straighten the wheels. Make sure you're in 4WD-low range if you have it. Try gently "rocking it"—go a little forward, a little in reverse, gradually so tires don't spin.

**Still stuck?** In snow or mud, put on your tire chains. If it's icy put sand or kitty litter in front of tires for traction. In mud or sand, use the carpet or traction mats you brought and if you have a pump, let a little air out of your tires to increase their "footprint."

If you're high-centered on an immovable obstacle, you can sometimes use your jack to raise the vehicle and push it off. Careful! Don't try if it may be unstable. Don't let the vehicle fall on you.

## Waiting it out

**If it's blazing hot, snowing hard or getting dark**, don't get overheated or wet and exhausted trying to free a stuck vehicle. Try your cell phone if you have one but don't count on it: many areas are out of range. Tie a signal flag to your vehicle antenna. You must dig your exhaust system clear of mud or snow if you'll be running the heater—otherwise lethal carbon monoxide fumes build up. If snow is still falling remember to keep it clear.

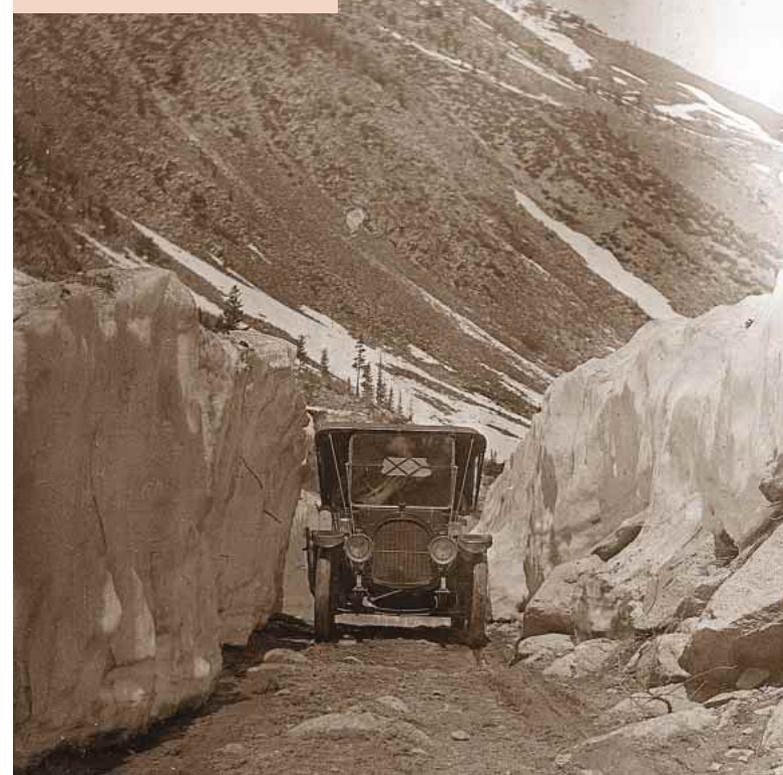
Then settle in to wait. Stay in your vehicle—it provides shelter and is much easier to find than a person on foot. You've told someone your trip plans—they'll know where to look. Bring all emergency supplies within easy reach.

If it's cold, take off any wet clothing, put on all your extra clothes and snuggle under your blanket or sleeping bag. Pile on floor mats, carpeting and seat covers as needed. Open a window just a crack for ventilation. Light a candle for warmth and light. Turn on the heater and run the engine for 5 minutes every half-hour or 10 minutes every hour. Eat your emergency food—the calories will warm you internally. Drink water—don't eat snow—melt it if needed, using your candle or heater vent. Use a can or plastic bag for a toilet. If you feel sleepy, warm up first if you're cold; then ensure good ventilation, shut off the engine and go to sleep.

If it's hot, open all the windows and use your vehicle for shade. Rest. Drink water regularly but don't drink all you have all at once.

In daylight and good weather conditions you can go back to getting unstuck. But again, don't exhaust yourself—conserve your energy.

High snowbanks in Bishop Creek Canyon, 1915  
COURTESY U.S. FOREST SERVICE



## CHECKLISTS

### Back-road Tools and Supplies

#### Carry in your vehicle at all times:

- Shovel
- Jack and lug wrench
- Small board for under jack in dirt
- A good spare tire
- Tire sealant
- Air pump and pressure gauge
- Tow strap
- Tire chains
- Jumper cables
- Other tools you know how to use
- Sand or kitty litter for traction on ice
- Carpet or traction mats for mud
- Fire extinguisher
- Flashlight
- Warning lights or road flares
- Ice scraper and brush for windshield
- Long-burning candles
- Bright piece of cloth for signal flag
- First aid kit
- Sunscreen and bug repellent
- Trash bags
- Toilet paper
- Maps, including this guide

#### Bring enough for each traveler:

- Spare clothing for all weather conditions
- Wide-brimmed shade hats, warm knit caps
- High-calorie emergency food
- Water—at least a gallon per person per day
- Sleeping bags or blankets
- Personal essentials such as prescription drugs

## Maintenance

- Check tires for wear and make sure tires are at proper air pressure—including spare
- Follow the maintenance checklist in your owner's manual
- Also top off the following:
  - Fuel tank
  - Motor oil
  - Transmission fluid
  - Radiator antifreeze/coolant
  - Windshield washer fluid

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